

**Background on Consensus Decision-making in the Context of the NCA 2013 Report  
(This is for information only and the NCADAC is not asked to approve – draft 8-7-12)**

As is the intent with all National Climate Assessment reports and products, the 2013 NCA report is expected to assess the current state of knowledge and as such will be a consensus-driven effort. There are well-articulated concerns that consensus-driven products can represent the ‘lowest common denominator of certainty’ among the participants at a given time and therefore fail to include emerging science or the full range of possible outcomes. However, the advantage of a consensus process is that there is increased confidence that what comprises the consensus is truly the best assessment of the state of both established and emerging ‘knowledge’ including statements regarding the confidence in that knowledge. Assuming all parties are acting in good faith, disagreements among the participants can indicate differing levels of confidence in a conclusion or in some cases may be more fundamental.

The consensus building process fosters and relies upon full participation and expression of the diversity of the views of all NCADAC members so that all parties understand the nature of the disagreement and have an opportunity to contribute to a solution that is satisfactory to all. All NCADAC members, including ex-officio members, are encouraged to fully participate in the consensus building discussions. The vigorous and thorough discussions that are part of consensus-building result in full exploration of the issues. A unified decision of the NCADAC is strongly preferred and a methodical consensus-building and consensus gauging process, such as the one described below, is most likely to achieve that result. To eliminate the concern that a member might hold up the process or feel trapped by a process leading to a unified view, an option to include a minority view in meeting minutes or a NCADAC product remains -- as a last resort.

Voting is not consistent with pursuit of consensus. Instead a straw-polling or gauging process can be used. For any decision, consensus is achieved when all voting-eligible members can agree to the following statement: “I can support this as an acceptable decision.”

The method for consensus-building and consensus gauging proposed below can be time-consuming, but the resulting thorough exploration of the issues is worthwhile.

**Proposed consensus process:**

After an appropriate time for discussion of any proposal for a NCADAC decision, the Chair restates or clarifies the proposal and asks if there is any member who is not ready to state that they can support the proposal as an acceptable decision. Ex-officio members will not participate in the consensus gauging process. If no member answers affirmatively, then consensus will be considered achieved. If any member answers affirmatively (that is, not ready

to support the proposal), then the Chair employs a consensus-building process designed to facilitate further positive discussion. The member(s) not ready to support the decision must either state that:

- I am blocking consensus and my proposal to un-block is....
- I need more information, which is....

Thereafter, further discussion is held based on the new information and/or new proposal. The gauging process is repeated until either consensus is achieved at the current meeting or subsequent meeting or the Chair determines that consensus is unlikely to be achieved. The Chair may propose that a subset of interested members work together, outside of the formal meeting, to attempt to develop a proposal that is acceptable to the interested parties. Any resulting proposal would then be submitted for consideration by the full NCADAC.

If, after following the process(es) above, the Chair determines that consensus cannot be achieved through further repeated process, the Chair informs the NCADAC of his/her conclusion. The member(s), except ex-officio members, who cannot support the proposal as an acceptable decision may submit in writing a minority view for recording in the minutes of a meeting (if the issue is a process or procedural one) or in the relevant NCADAC product (for issues related to NCADAC products). It is preferable to work the minority position into the language of the report or product rather than having a separate minority report, but a minority option is considered to be a last resort if all efforts to reach a consensus fail.